

The Narrative Functions of Perfective Auxiliaries in Early Heian Kundokubun Texts*

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Abstract

Kundokubun is a linguistic style of early spoken Japanese adapted for translating texts written in Sinitic script. The earliest examples of *kundokubun* are Buddhist texts rendered visually via a system of morphosyntactic and phonetic glosses at the onset of the Heian period (794–1185 CE). This study analyzes the use of the early Japanese perfective auxiliaries *tu* and *nu* both quantitatively and qualitatively in narrative passages in these texts. It finds that, as perfectives that index changes of state, *tu* and *nu* mark events that are both dynamic and central to the narrative progression. This study finds the narrative function of these perfectives in early Heian *kundokubun* narration to be that of foregrounding events that advance the stories within these texts.

Key words

Kundokubun, Early Middle Japanese, aspect, narrative

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1. Introduction

Kundokubun (訓読文) is a linguistic style of early spoken Japanese adapted for reading texts that were written in Sinitic script aloud in Japanese or quoting Sinitic texts in Japanese. The earliest extant texts clearly rendered in *kundokubun* via a system of morphosyntactic and phonetic glosses are found at the onset of the Heian period (794–1185 CE). The focus of this study is two earlier Japanese perfective auxiliaries, or inflecting suffixes, *tu* and *nu*. Scholars such as Kasuga (1985b), Tsukishima (1967), Ōtsubo (1992), and Kobayashi (2012) have investigated the semantics of these perfectives in Heian period *kundokubun* texts. They primarily find *nu* governing intransitive and passive predicates and *tu* governing transitive and causative predicates. These distinctions regarding transitivity and valency are seen in contemporary secular texts as well, leading Quinn (1987) to label *tu* as an exoactive perfective, generally governing verbs directed outward from the subject, and *nu* as an endoactive perfective, generally with verbs directed toward the subject. Verbs commonly governed by the endoactive perfective *nu* in *kundokubun* are *naru* (なる ‘become’), *siru* (知る ‘learn’), and *itaru* (至る ‘reach’). Examples of verbs that the exoactive perfective *tu* often governs are *u* (得 ‘gain’), *kiku* (聞く ‘hear’), and *usinapu* (失ふ ‘lose (something)’).

There is an abundance of research on the narrative functions of these perfective auxiliaries, i.e., how they are used by a narrator when constructing a story, in vernacular Heian texts. Kumakura, for example, argues “*tu* and *nu* signify the realized point in time, punctuating the flux of time wherever a change occurs in the course of event” (1980:74). Suzuki (1999) and Watase (2013) highlight the use of both when narrators shift scenes and *tu*’s potential to mark recent past tense.

In contrast with the vividness of *wabun* (和文 ‘Japanese style’) tales, *kundokubun* has commonly been defined as a more formalized register of Japanese due to its abundance of calques resulting from its Sinitic source texts (Lurie 2011, Guest 2013). Thus, while the narrative functions of the perfective auxiliaries *tu* and *nu* have been studied in Heian period vernacular tales, there has yet to be a study of their relation to narrative structure in *kundokubun*. While considering their pragmatics in secular *wabun* tales, the purpose of this study is to determine the narrative functions of the two perfective auxiliaries in the genre of early Heian *kundokubun* texts.

2. Methodology

This research primarily follows the methodology of Nara (2011), who codes every sentence of Natsume Sōseki’s 1906 novel *Botchan* for its location in the text, lexical aspect of the sentence, transitivity, tense, location within the episodic structure, and discourse function. While Nara investigates the functions of the auxiliary *ta* in Modern Japanese, this study focuses on the Early Middle Japanese auxiliaries *nu* and *tu* in *kundokubun* narration. Every sentence ending in one of the two perfective auxiliaries was coded for transitivity, lexical aspect, and discourse function. The use of *nu* and *tu* in subordinate clauses are not included in this analysis because their embedding limits their interaction with the discourse. Including transitivity and lexical aspect in the analysis allows us to determine whether they affect how these perfectives are used narratively. The remainder of this section describes the coding process and from where data were gathered.

2.1 Transitivity

Nara (2011) gives each sentence a score of 0 to 3 based on Hopper and Thompson’s ten transitivity parameters (1980:252), with 0 being in quotations, 1 having low, 2 having medium,

and 3 having high transitivity. As direct quotations are beyond the scope of this study, for this parameter, intransitive predicates are scored (1); transitive predicates that do not result in change in their direct object, (2); and both ditransitive predicates (causatives) and transitive predicates that result in a change in their direct object, (3). For example, *nari-nu* (なりぬ ‘become-NU’), being intransitive, is scored (1); *mi-tu* (見つ ‘see-TU’), being transitive but not resulting in a clear change, is scored (2); and *e-sime-tu* (得令めつ ‘receive-CAUSATIVE-TU’) and *usinapi-tu* (失ひつ ‘lose-TU’), being a causative and a transitive resulting in a clear change, respectively, are scored (3).

2.2 Lexical aspect

Lexical aspect is determined by the predicate’s stativity (whether it is static or dynamic), durativity (whether it occurs or remains over an interval or not), and telicity (whether there is an endpoint or not) using the Kenny-Vendler system (Kenny 1963, Vendler 1967). Following Nara’s (2011) coding, each sentence-final predicate is determined to be (1) a state (static, durative, atelic), (2) an activity (dynamic, durative, atelic), (3) an accomplishment (dynamic, durative, telic), or (4) an achievement (dynamic, instantaneous, telic). For the purposes of this study, the lexical aspect of finite predicates is coded with their full morphology in context. In other words, although *ipu* (言ふ ‘speak’) is an activity as a bare verb without context, when it is governed by the perfective auxiliary *tu* after someone speaks it becomes an accomplishment due its telicity, or having an endpoint. Examples would be *ari-ki* (ありき ‘be/have-past’), state; *kango.si-ki* (歡娛しき ‘delight-past’), activity; *kiki-tu* (聞きつ ‘hear-tu’), accomplishment; and *nari-nu* (成りぬ ‘become-nu’), achievement.

2.3 Discourse function

Nara (2011) was influenced by Labov’s (1972) six “elements of narrative structure.” However, instead of coding quotations cited by the narrator as evaluations he gives them their own category, leading to seven “discourse function types” that he uses in his analysis of narrative in Japanese. Following Nara’s categorization, scores of (1) for Abstract, (2) for Orientation, (3) for Quotation and Semi-direct quotation, (4) for Complication, (5) for Evaluation, (6) for Result, and (7) for Coda are given to each sentence-final predicate. The Abstract outlines the story; the Orientation establishes the characters and setting; Quotations are when a character is speaking in a narrative and Semi-direct quotations are predicates outside of direct quotations governed by the quotative particle *to*;¹ Complications, or Complicating Actions, are events that move the story forward; Evaluations describe a scene or make an evaluative comment regarding its development (and thus pause the plot); Results bring closure to the scene; and the Coda shifts the focus from the story to the present time of presenting the narrative.

2.4 Data sources

Data were drawn from the following Buddhist texts rendered into *kundokubun* via gloss during the first half of the Heian period: an early-9th-century CE complete rendering of the *Golden Light Sutra* (金光明最勝王經 *Konkōmyōsaishōōkyō*) glossed at Saidaiji temple (Kasuga 1985a), a

¹ There are numerous narratives within quotations in Buddhist texts, the majority of which are depicted as spoken by the Buddha in response to a question regarding Buddhist practice or cosmology. Once an embedded narrative begins, the lines therein are scored for their discourse function on their own accord, with character lines scored as Quotations.

mid-9th-century CE rendering of the 5th and 9th scrolls of the *Golden Light Sutra* glossed at Tōdaiji temple (Tabuchi 1987), a late-9th-century CE rendering of eight scrolls of the *Kṣitigarbha Ten Wheels Sutra* (地蔵十輪經 *Jizōjūrinkyō*) (Nakada 1958, Nakada 1980), and an early-10th-century CE complete rendering of the *Innumerable Meanings Sutra* (無量義經 *Muryōgikyō*) (Kabutogi and Nakada 1979). The cited researchers have deciphered the original glossed texts and rendered them into *kakikudashibun* (書き下し文), or a transliteration of the glossed Sinitic script into Japanese script.

3. Data and results

Among the four early Heian *kundokubun* data sources, a total of 156 instances of the endoactive perfective *nu* and 117 instances of the exoactive perfective *tu* were found in sentence-final position. The following subsections include quantitative and qualitative analyses of the transitivity, lexical aspect, and discourse function of sentences ending in these auxiliaries.

3.1 Transitivity of sentence-final perfectives

As previous studies cited above have established, the choice between these auxiliaries is primarily one of transitivity, which bears out in their use in the *kundokubun* texts. Table 1 overviews the transitivity of sentences governed by *nu* and *tu*.

Table 1. Transitivity of sentence-final perfectives

perfective	low (%)	medium (%)	high (%)
<i>nu</i>	129 (83%)	25 (16%)	2 (1%)
<i>tu</i>	20 (17%)	54 (46%)	43 (37%)

As expected, we find *nu* governing primarily low-transitivity predicates, such as the following prototypical example.

(1) 仏の所に来詣しぬ。 (Kabutogi and Nakada 1979:78)

potoke no tokoro ni raikēi.si-nu
 buddha GEN place LOC approach-NU
 ‘[Each] **approached** the place of the Buddha.’

Verbs of motion in *kundokubun*, such as *raikēi.su* (来詣 ‘approach’), are semantically intransitive changes of state, making them common predicates to be governed by the endoactive perfective *nu* when used in discourse. Auxiliary *tu*, in contrast, is found primarily governing predicates of medium and high transitivity, such as the following high transitivity example.

(2) 一切の法に於て勇健の想を得つ。 (Kabutogi and Nakada 1979:110)

issai no papu ni.oki-te yūgon no sau wo e-tu
 all GEN dharma regarding robust GEN thought ACC attain-TU
 ‘They **attain** robust thoughts regarding all dharma.’

Although it is being used more metaphorically in (2), the verb *u* (得 ‘attain’) is coded as high transitivity due to the motion and change of status of the object which is attained. This verb is

almost uniformly governed by *tu* (in its participial form *e*, hence *e-tu* above) when used in narrative. However, we find *tu* primarily governing predicates of medium transitivity in *kundokubun*, such as the following example.

(3) 佛の此の甚深の空性を説きたまふを聞きつ。(Tabuchi 1987:58)

potoke no ko no zintan no kūsyau wo toki-tamapu wo kiki-tu
 buddha GEN this GEN deep GEN emptiness ACC explain-HON ACC hear-TU
 ‘They heard the Buddha explaining this deep emptiness.’

Verbs of listening and speaking, such as *kiku* (聞く ‘hear’) in (3), take that which is spoken as an argument with the accusative marker *wo*, as we find here, making the sentence medium transitivity. The sutras investigated in this study are full of embedded conversations, and verbs of speaking and listening are both plentiful and often governed by *tu* in narratives. Thus, we find a higher percentage of medium transitivity in *tu* use among these texts. The 25 instances of medium transitivity *nu* are predominantly when it governs *siru* (知る ‘learn’), as in (4) below.

(4) 法を護る人は、諸法の一昧を知りぬ。(Nakada 1980:187)

papu wo mamoru pito pa syopapu no itimi wo siri-nu
 dharma ACC protect person TOP all.dharma GEN nature ACC learn-NU
 ‘One who protects the dharma learns the nature of all dharma.’

Although ‘learn’ takes an argument in the accusative case, the change is internal to the subject, thus endoactive, and so we find it governed by *nu*. The nature of *kundokubun* being based on translation also leads to some predicates governed by *nu* with uncharacteristically high transitivity.

Kasuga (1985b:230) notes that, due to a strong association between the Sinitic character 已 (‘complete, finish’) and auxiliary *nu*, there are cases of *nu* being used for a *kundokubun* rendition of 已 when *tu* would be a more likely candidate for perfectivity marking given the context. Below are three such examples.

(5) 親近すること得已。(Kasuga 1985a:28)

sinkin.suru koto e-nu
 become.close NMLZ attain-NU
 ‘They are able to become close.’

(6) 是の語を説き已。(Kasuga 1985a:122)

ko no go wo toki-nu
 this GEN word ACC expound-NU
 ‘They expound these words.’

(7) 仏、是の経を説き已りたまひぬ。(Kabutogi and Nakada 1979:102)

potoke ko no kyau wo toki-wopari-tamapi-nu
 buddha this GEN sutra ACC expound-finish-HON-NU
 ‘The Buddha finished expounding this sutra.’

The verb *u* (得 ‘attain’) is most often governed by *tu* when marked for perfectivity, as we see in (2) above. However, due to the use of the Sinitic character 已 in (5), the perfective auxiliary *nu* was used in the *kundokubun* translation. Verbs of speaking and listening, such as *toku* (説く ‘expound’), found in (6) and (7) and *kiku* (‘hear’) in (3) above, are generally governed by the perfective aspect marker *tu* due to their taking an accusative argument and bringing a change to the scene external to the character. The strong association with the character 已, even when it is explicitly read as *woparu* (‘finish’) in (7), causes the predicate to be marked for perfective aspect with *nu*. We now turn to the relation the two perfectives have with lexical aspect.

3.2 Lexical aspect of sentence-final perfectives

The following table summarizes the lexical aspect of sentence-final predicates governed by one of the perfective auxiliaries.

Table 2. Lexical aspect of sentence-final perfectives

perfective	stative (%)	activity (%)	accomplishment (%)	achievement (%)
<i>nu</i>	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	15 (25%)	141 (75%)
<i>tu</i>	0 (0%)	3 (3%)	25 (21%)	89 (76%)

The preponderance of telic sentences, i.e., those with a given endpoint such as accomplishments and achievements, is due to the semantics of perfective aspect. This temporal aspect requires an endpoint and thus the lexical aspect of sentences governed by these auxiliaries mostly follow this restriction. At 75% and 76%, respectively, both *nu* and *tu* primarily govern achievements, or changes of state with no duration. Examples (1) and (2) above, *raikei.si-nu* (approach-NU) and *e-tu* (attain-TU), respectively, are representative of these changes of state. As mentioned above, verbs of motion such as *raikei.su* are not durative in *kundokubun* nor other varieties of registers of Japanese as they signify the moment of arrival.

About a quarter of each perfective governs durative events with endpoints, or accomplishments. This is because verbs that indicate activities when in their bare form generally indicate accomplishments when governed by a perfective, such as the case of *kiku* (‘listen’) in (3) above. The activity verb *kiku* gains an endpoint and that endpoint is marked grammatically with *tu*, resulting in the durative but telic accomplishment *kiki-tu*.

The data include three cases of auxiliary *tu* marking an activity, or a durative, atelic event with no clear end point. Below is one such example.

(8) 貌端嚴にして、父母に偏に愛念せられつ。(Kasuga 1985a:192)

meutangon.ni.si-te bumo ni pitoe.ni ainen.se-rare-tu
 be.beautiful-GER father.mother ABL sincerely deeply.love-PASSIVE-TU
 ‘He was beautiful and sincerely deeply loved by our parents.’

The speaker is describing his younger brother, who had recently sacrificed himself to feed a mother tiger and her cubs. Here, *ainen.se-raru* ‘be deeply loved’ is an activity from the recent past. Auxiliary *tu* is also known as a marker of recent past (Quinn 1987, Suzuki 1999, Watase 2013, among others), a use we find, albeit rarely, in early Heian Buddhist texts. In the following section we see how these two perfectives, with their affinity with changes of state, function in the

discourse.

3.3 Discourse function of sentence-final perfectives

The table below outlines of the discourse functions of the auxiliaries *nu* and *tu* in early Heian *kundokubun*. Because there were no abstracts, orientations, or codas with a sentence-final perfective, they are not included in the table.

Table 3. Discourse function of sentence-final perfectives

perfective	quotation (%)	complication (%)	evaluation (%)	result (%)
<i>nu</i>	15 (10%)	129 (83%)	0 (0%)	12 (8%)
<i>tu</i>	27 (23%)	87 (74%)	3 (3%)	0 (0%)

Both perfectives are used a small percentage of the time in non-narrative quotations. In narrative passages they are predominantly found in complications, or events that move the story forward, such as the following example.

(9) 審に射て象王の心を中りつ。 (Nakada 1958:68)

tumapiraka.ni i-te zauwau no kokoro wo yaburi-tu
 clearly shoot-GER elephant.king GEN heart ACC pierce-TU
 ‘Shooting clearly, they **pierced** the heart of the elephant king.’

Here, *tu* governs *yaburu* (‘pierce’) to depict the slaying of the elephant king, one of the primary events of the narrative passage from which it is drawn. Although auxiliary *nu* is primary found in complications, such as (1) and (6) above, it also occasionally governs results at the end of narrative passages, such as the following.

(10) 右に三市遶りて、退きて一面に坐しぬ。 (Kasuga 1985a:1)

migi ni sansapu mapari-te sirizoki-te itimen ni za.si-nu
 right LOC three.times circumambulate-GER withdraw-GER one.side LOC sit-NU
 ‘Having circumambulated to the right three times, they withdrew and **sat down** to one side.’

(11) 彼の池の邊に至りぬ。 (Tabuchi 1987:82)

ka no ike no potori ni itari-nu
 that GEN pond GEN side LOC arrive-NU
 ‘They **arrived** at that lake.’

The line in (10) is repeated throughout the *Golden Light Sutra* as characters are introduced and sit around the Buddha before another group appears upon the stage. Verbs of motion, such as *itaru* (至る ‘arrive’) found in (11), are often used at the end of scenes. The sentence following (11) begins with *ko no toki ni* (是の時に ‘at this time’), which is a common way a new scene is introduced in sutra narration.

The few examples of *tu* in evaluations are similar to what we see in (12) below.

(12) 是の人は究竟して自を損じ他を損じつ、一切の諸佛の救ふこと能は不所なり。

(Nakada 1958:78)

ko no pito pa kukyau.si-te zi wo son.ji ta wo son.ji-tu
 this GEN person TOP master-GER self ACC deny other ACC deny-TU
 ‘This person, having reached ultimate attainment, denied the existence of self and denied the existence of non-self.’

The sentence that follows (12) in the text is *Issai no syobutu no sukupu koto kanapanu tokoro nari* (一切の諸佛の救ふこと能は不所なり ‘It was that they were unable to be saved by all the Buddhas.’). The “topic-*pa* comment-*nari*” structure is fairly common in *kundokubun* texts and the comment is not always limited to a single sentence, which suggests that the *tu* we find in (12) is actually embedded within this structure. We find all three examples of *tu* marking an evaluation in this kind of multi-sentence comment structure concluding with the copula *nari*.

4. Conclusions

This paper has given an overview of how the endoactive perfective auxiliary *nu* and the exoactive perfective auxiliary *tu* relate to transitivity, lexical aspect, and discourse function of sentences in early Heian *kundokubun* narration. The following table sums up the above findings.

Table 4. Overview of sentence-final perfectives

perfective	transitivity	lexical aspect	discourse function
<i>nu</i>	low (83%)	achievement (75%)	complications (83%)
<i>tu</i>	mid (46%)/high (37%)	achievement (85%)	complications (74%)

We find that the transitivity of sentences governed by *nu* and *tu* are as expected given their respective endo- and exoactivity, particularly when the general lack of high transitivity predicates in sutra narration is considered. As perfectives that, beyond the semantic extension of *tu* in which it is used to mark recent past tense, indicate changes of state, most sentences they govern are achievements, or instantaneous telic events. Regarding discourse function, both most often are used in complications, or dynamic events that advance the narrative.

Although we find perfective *nu* in some results, i.e., at the end of narrative passages, as we saw in (10) and (11) above, we do not find *tu* performing the same role. This is because scene changes in Buddhist narratives most often include intransitive verbs of motion. In other words, it is the difference in transitivity that leads *nu* to being the sole perfective used in results. However, a reason *nu* is still generally limited to complications is that results in *kundokubun* are most often governed by the established fact, or past, auxiliary *ki*, such as in the following example.

(13) 座よりして起ちて、其の本處に還りにき。(Kasuga 1985a:19)

za yori.si-te tati-te so no ponsyo ni kaperi-ni-ki
 seat from stand-GER that GEN original.place LOC return-NU-PAST
 ‘He stood up from his seat and returned to his original place.’

The sentence concluding in (13) begins with *Meudau bosatu pa potoke no asi o reisitatematuriwoparite* (妙幢菩薩は佛の足を礼したてまつり已りて ‘Kṣitigarbha, having finished paying obeisance to the Buddha’s feet’). Although the verb ‘return’ (還る *kaperu*) is

governed by the perfective *nu* to show its completion, because it is at the conclusion of a scene, auxiliary *ki* is employed by the narrator to perform its usual role in *kundokubun* narration, which is framing the discourse (see Bundschuh 2020).

Kundokubun is limited in its lexical selection because it is the result of translating Sinitic texts essentially word-for-word into Japanese. However, this paper shows that the Early Middle Japanese perfective auxiliaries *nu* and *tu* were used in translating these religious texts in ways parallel to how we find them in more secular early Japanese narratives. Although occasionally limited by translation conventions, such as the correlation between the Sinitic character 已 and *nu* displayed in section 3.1 above, the monks who rendered these Sinitic sutras into Japanese were clearly aware of their overarching narrative structure as they used the two perfective auxiliaries at their disposal to convey the dynamic stories embedded within the texts to a Japanese audience at the onset of the Heian period.

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